

Series: The Cross

April 16, 2017

## **Title: The Garden Tomb**

**[Slide 1]**

**Text: Mark 15:40-16:8**

### **Through a tiny door**

**3:00 p.m., Friday, April 3, A.D. 33**

At 3:00 p.m. on Friday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> in the year 33 a powerful 6.0 magnitude earthquake struck the city of Jerusalem. Geologists from the German Research Center for Geoscience found incontrovertible evidence of the quake in sediments along the western shore of the Dead Sea. Wavy lines of sediment capture the moment that the earthquake struck.

The earthquake toppled at least one important building just yards from the Temple complex. Stone walls came crashing down; people poured into the streets. A cloud of dust rose slowly over the city. Within the Temple itself, the walls shifted sufficiently to cause the great temple veil to be torn in two from top to bottom.

And just outside the city walls, three crosses trembled like reeds in the wind. Soldiers and bystanders struggled to keep their footing. When the Roman centurion in charge of the three crucifixions looked up at the center cross, he could see that its victim was dead. In awe, he proclaimed: "Surely this man was the Son of God." (Mark 15:39 NIV)

In the distance, a large group of women struggled back to their feet. They included Mary Magdalene, a woman named Mary the mother of James the Younger and Joseph, and a woman named Salome. They had followed Jesus all the way from the earliest days in Galilee. And now they were present at the end of His journey.

### **Death Certificate:**

Death is a mysterious thing, even today. Imagine how much more so in a time when there were no stethoscopes or heart monitors. So how do we know that Jesus really died?

This was even more of an issue when it came to crucifixion. Victims regularly lasted two or three days on the cross. Death came all too slowly; that was the point. No wonder, then, that the Roman governor, Pilate, was surprised to find a prominent member of Jewish society – and member of the Sanhedrin – coming to him that afternoon, asking permission to bury the criminal's body. Pilate conducted his own investigation before granting his permission:

**[Slide 2]**

*Mark 15:44-45 NIV*

*Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body [lit. "corpse"] to Joseph.*

Joseph went back to Golgotha to bury Jesus before sunset in keeping with Jewish law:

**[Slide 3]**

*Mark 15:46 NIV*

*So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.*

End of story. The bad guys came out on top. The good guy lost. The sun set on the same old broken world. Or so it seemed.

**Through a tiny door:**

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The tomb in which Joseph buried the body of Jesus was typical of the rock-cut tombs of the upper class. It consisted of a front chamber or porch cut into the rock face of an old quarry. At the back of the front chamber was a tiny doorway, just 2' by 2'. Inside the tiny door was a room 6' by 6' with room to stand. On one side was a stone shelf where the body was placed. In the walls of the little room were niches for stone boxes that would hold the bones of various family members once their bodies had decayed.

In the fading light, Joseph and his servants carried Jesus' body down into the old quarry. One of them would have crawled into the tomb first to help pull the body through the tiny door. Then they would have laid his body on the shelf with some fragrant spices, crawled back out into the twilight, and rolled a large stone over the little doorway.

Mark tells us that their every move was carefully observed by two of the women who had been at the cross:

**[Slide 5]**

*Mark 15:47 NIV*

*Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.*

**The Garden Tomb**

**6:00 a.m., Sunday, April 5, 33**

36 hours later the same three women who had watched Jesus die on the cross came to finish His funeral:

**[Slide 6]**

*Mark 16:1-3 NIV*

*When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.*

**[Slide 7]** *Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"*

They had been with Jesus at the beginning of His story; now He was gone and they were coming to give His story the proper ending.

Their greatest concern was very practical: How to get through that tiny door?

**Not alone!**

Whatever story they thought they were ending was blown to pieces by what happened next! For starters, when they got to the tomb, the huge stone had already been rolled away and the tiny black opening stood open to the world.

**[Slide 8]**

Undaunted, the three women got down on all fours and squeezed their way into the tomb. Imagine their terror when they found that they were not alone:

**[Slide 9]**

*Mark 16:5 NIV*

*As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.*

How would you feel if you crawled into a pitch black tomb and found someone sitting on the place where the body was supposed to be lying? Alarmed? Scared witless? And remember, the only way out is a tiny 2' by 2' doorway.

**Heaven's message:**

Before they could make their escape, the young man spoke:

**[Slide 10]**

*Mark 16:6-7 NIV*

*"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"*

Creation had groaned with the grinding of tectonic plates and the shattering of rock at the moment that Jesus died. Now Heaven announced that *here, in this place where Jesus had lain dead just hours before, He had risen*. This old earth had just given birth to the resurrected Son of God.

And at that moment, these three women were the only human beings to know the good news. It was upon them to tell Peter and the other disciples.

**The end or the beginning?****Neat and tidy:**

We tend to like our stories to be neat and tidy. Think of what you expect to happen when you go to the movies. No matter how suspenseful the story, no matter how many twists and turns the plot takes, no matter how desperate the hero's situation might appear, *you know that before the final credits you'll have all the answers.* We like our stories like that: neat and tidy.

Which brings us to Mark's story of Jesus. You see, the original text of Mark ends in a way that is anything but neat and tidy:

**[Slide 11]**

*Mark 16:8 NIV*

*Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

That's it. Trembling, bewildered, terrified, dumbstruck, running for their very lives. The End.

No wonder pious copyists felt compelled to provide a "more satisfactory" ending! That's why our Bibles have verses 9-20. But that wasn't the story Mark was telling. His story ended with verse 8. Not neat and tidy.

**Brave new world:**

In Mark's story of Jesus the women stagger out into a brand new world. They knew how the world worked when they crouched down to enter the tomb. They had absolutely no grid for the world they re-entered when they fled from the tomb.

Trembling, bewildered, terrified, dumbstruck, running for their lives. These emotions are like those people experienced when they caught a glimpse of Jesus' majesty and power. When Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples

**[Slide 12]**

*Mark 4:41 NIV*

*...were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

So what were the women asking each other?

**[Slide 13]**

*"Who is this? Even Death and the grave obey him!"*

This wasn't the neat and tidy end of a story – even if it was a tragedy. This was something else: The Beginning of a totally new story, a story that had never been imagined, much less told before.

**The Beginning!**

Our stories are always an extension of what we already know. Mark tells us that *God's story* is most definitely *not* an extension of anything you already know. It will blow you out of the water. It will squeeze you through the tiny tomb door out into a world you never knew existed.

You won't have words for this new world and this new story. You will just have to start living it. Scary? Out of your comfort zone? Welcome to God's New World.

But out there in that New World, Jesus is waiting for you. You will find Him. He will find you. This old world has nothing for you. In this old world with its old story your biggest concern was getting the stone out of the way so that you could bury one more loss, one more disappointment, one more failure.

But look inside: He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

And then, go out into God's brand New Creation and let Him find you!

## LIFE Group Lesson for “The Garden Tomb”

### Ice Breaker

- What’s your favorite kind of story: mystery, romance, historical novel, sci-fi, wartime, or what?
- Why do you like that kind of story?

### Some kind of story!

- Have you noticed that when Mark tells the story of Jesus’ crucifixion, he makes no mention of how people felt? Peter cries over his own personal failure. Jesus cries out in desolation. But other than that, the story is told in simple, factual terms.
  - The women watch from a distance, then follow Joseph to the tomb.
  - Their role is to report not what they felt, but what they saw: Jesus died on a cross; Jesus was buried in a nearby tomb.
- So what about the story of the resurrection?
  - At first, we learn that the women travel to the tomb. Again, no emotion, no weeping or wailing. Just three women focused on their task.
  - Their biggest concern: getting into the tomb. Who will roll away the stone covering the entrance?
- It is only when they are actually in the tomb that Mark conveys their emotional state:
  - *Mark 16:5 NIV*
  - *...they were alarmed.*
  - *Mark 16:8 NIV*
  - *Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*
- That’s it: alarm, bewilderment, terror.
  - And that is where Mark leaves off!
  - Is that any way to end a story?
  - Or is he starting another one?
  - And if he is starting another one, how do we fit in?
- The women flee from the tomb. But the good news is that out there in this brand new world, Jesus is waiting for them. He has gone before them to Galilee.

## **The Beginning of the Good News...**

- Mark began his gospel by saying:
  - The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.
- In a way, his whole gospel is just *the beginning of the Good News*. Maybe that's why he doesn't end the story. It keeps on going – right down to our time.
- To live that story, we must do what the women did: leave the old behind and go to where Jesus awaits us.
- What do you have that you need to leave behind?

### **Prayer time:**

- Pray for each other for courage and faith in this new journey!